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## Leader Stifled by War's Reality

Obstacles Confound Md. Lawmaker's Tour of Duty in Iraq

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BAGHDAD -- If the United States were at peace, Del. Anthony G. Brown would be making deals in the Maryland State House in Annapolis. Instead, Lt. Col. Brown is sipping sugary tea in a bureaucrat's cubicle here, trying to wrest a tangible accomplishment out of his year in Iraq.

On a crisp morning early this month, he sits down with a senior official of the Ministry of Displacement and Migration, which Brown serves as a U.S.-appointed consultant. He wants the ministry to support low-cost housing for uprooted Iraqis in the north-central Diyala province. A nonprofit group has arranged funding for a pilot project.

The official doesn't like the plan. He thinks the mud-brick building materials will be of poor quality. Brown, a lawyer in the Army Reserve, is blunt: "My interest is to turn some dirt in Iraq. We've got to build houses."

The official relents with a saccharine smile. "I will be happy," he says.

Brown's tour of duty illustrates the complexities, the contradictions, at times the folly of the American experience in Iraq. With no knowledge of Arabic, no background in the Middle East and no expertise in refugee issues, Brown has had to rely on his political, organizational and leadership skills to advise the ministry.

These qualities have served him well at home. A Democratic delegate from Prince George's County and majority whip in the House of Delegates, he is seen as a potential candidate for state attorney general or lieutenant governor next year. He says he can marshal the votes to be the next speaker of the House.

On Feb. 28, Brown will become the first House member to give the traditional Washington's Day address from outside the chamber. His 14-minute, videotaped speech will be projected on a large screen.

An aspiring politician since his boyhood on Long Island, N.Y., Brown, 43, joined the Army ROTC as a sophomore at Harvard University and spent five years on active duty before attending Harvard Law School. He has an officeholder's zeal for showing quick results to voters, and he saw his year-long deployment with the 353rd Civil Affairs Command, based at Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island, N.Y., as an opportunity to meld his role as a soldier with his experience in government. He arrived in Baghdad in September.

His enthusiasm often has turned to frustration. He has learned at the ministry that the United States is more feared than loved and that an effective democratic political system is a mature one. Iraq's is neither.

The elections last month gave Brown a sense of euphoria and renewed his determination to get something done, but the obstacles the United States faces in Iraq and the atmosphere of almost constant threat have sapped his energy.

"You can't make a democracy in this kind of environment," he said. "It is going to take much longer than I ever anticipated to reestablish an Iraqi government, the organizations, entities and bureaucracies that are going to have to sustain this population."

His estimate: five years.

"Things just move very slowly."

### Workouts and Churchill

Brown's home, the U.S.-protected Green Zone, is a patch of about five square miles at the center of Baghdad, bordered by a bend in the Tigris River and barriers erected by the U.S. military: concrete walls, concertina wire and checkpoints.

He rises each morning in a white, prefabricated trailer with two rooms and a bathroom. His room has two beds and two closets, a television, a refrigerator and an air conditioner. He is thankful his roommate doesn't snore.

The trailer is one of hundreds in orderly rows behind the domed, marble-lined palace that once served as the seat of Saddam Hussein's regime. The building is now the U.S. Embassy. The trailers were set up by Kellogg Brown & Root Inc., the Halliburton Co. subsidiary that also provides Brown's food and cleans his clothes.

Brown's trailer is in an area called Poolside Suites. The name is not pure whimsy. A kidney-shaped pool, built for the palace's former occupants, offers some recreation. The dusty earth is sand-colored, and palm trees tower overhead.

Each group of four trailers is surrounded by eight-foot walls of sandbags to contain any damage from incoming mortars or rockets. On Jan. 29, a rocket struck an embassy annex that Brown sometimes walks through, killing a U.S. civilian and a Navy officer.

One place to relax is the Palace Fitness Center, built inside an old warehouse about a three-minute walk from Brown's trailer. Some soldiers work out with their weapons, toting M-16s from station to station. ESPN plays on television monitors.

Brown goes most days. He is in better shape today than at any time since he graduated from Army flight school in 1985.

On the walk back to Poolside Suites, he can pick up his laundry and dry cleaning. The latter is sent outside the Green Zone, meaning that some suits and uniforms spend more time in the real Iraq than their owners do.

Brown keeps in touch with his family mainly through e-mail, but communication is sometimes difficult. He asked his wife, Patricia Arzuaga, to set up an e-mail account for their daughter, Rebecca, who is 10 -- they also have a son, Jonathan, 4 -- so she could write to him directly. Arzuaga says Rebecca has not written as much as Brown would like, because she does not know what to say.

The Green Zone has a salsa night, swing dancing and other diversions, but Brown stays away. As a member of the U.S. military on active duty, he is forbidden to drink alcohol, and it is no fun watching the civilians imbibe.

So there is cable TV in the trailer and a sober set of bedside books: Karen Armstrong on Islam, Bernard Lewis on the Middle East, Christopher Catherwood on Winston Churchill.

Sometimes, lying in his narrow bed, he hears the whistle and boom of an incoming mortar. "Hey," he thinks. "Here I am trying to help, and these [people] are trying to kill me."

On the day before Thanksgiving, Jim Mollen, 48, a consultant to another Iraqi ministry, left the Green Zone alone in an unarmored SUV. He was due to leave in a few days, and he may have wanted to say goodbye to Iraqi colleagues. He was shot and killed as he drove.

Mollen's death stunned Brown. The two men often had sat next to each other at a regular morning meeting.

### Talking in Circles

Brown regards his ministry post as a chance to work hands-on with Iraqi officials to reconstruct the country. It has been hard to see results. "I don't think [ministry officials] are doing much, if anything, for displaced people in Iraq," he said.

Momtaz A. Morad, a senior ministry official, said in an interview that the agency has funded a one-time food distribution to 50,000 families. But he conceded that the new ministry, a creation of the U.S.-imposed provisional government that handed sovereignty to the Iraqis in June, has yet to build anything lasting, such as housing for the hundreds of thousands of displaced people in the country.

For example, the Baath Party forced Kurds from the north and replaced them with Iraqi Arabs from the south. The Baathists hoped to keep Kurds from claiming northern oil or agitating for autonomy.

Fired up by the enthusiastic response to the elections, Brown has resolved to push harder.

"The approach I've got to take is, 'This is what you need to do,'" he said after a visit to the ministry subsequent to the vote. The ministry is just outside the Green Zone, but security concerns dictate that Brown make the seven-minute commute in a convoy of armored Humvees.

On Feb. 3, Morad and Brown discussed a project put forward by a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that wants to build housing for Arabs displaced by Kurds returning to areas they claim as their own.

Morad, an engineer, told Brown he was skeptical about the quality of the building materials. He touted a more expensive plan to fund housing for Assyrian Christian villagers in northern Iraq. The conversation was a small example of how politics in Iraq are driven by religious and ethnic considerations. Morad is an Assyrian Christian.

Brown held firm. "I think we need to work with this group," he said, adding that inspecting the materials is another ministry's responsibility. Morad acquiesced.

On other occasions, Brown can only watch as U.S. and Iraqi officials solve the same problem again and again.

On Jan. 17, he took a seat on a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter headed for Fallujah, the city about 35 miles west of Baghdad that witnessed intense fighting between U.S. Marines and Iraqi insurgents in April and again in November.

His destination was a meeting of Iraqi officials, officers of the U.S.-led military coalition, and civilian aid workers seeking to encourage residents to return to their bullet-riddled city. The group had met weekly for six weeks, but the main topic hadn't changed: the Marines' strict control over entry to Fallujah, intended to prevent the return of insurgents.

The discussion went in circles: Coalition officers pressed the Iraqis to provide more services for returning residents -- bring in police, restore water and electricity, offer compensation. The Iraqis said they couldn't get into the city to do this work.

Brown's ministry oversees the provision of some humanitarian supplies to displaced residents of Fallujah. But his Iraqi colleagues, who had driven from Baghdad, were absent because they couldn't clear the Marine checkpoints. With no one to advise, Brown sat on the sidelines.

After about four hours, the session ended as earlier gatherings have, with commitments to improve access.

Each side blamed the other. An Iraqi official who declined to be identified further said, "The power is on the side of the Americans."

"The Iraqis," countered Brig. Gen. Steven J. Hashem, Brown's commanding officer, who directs civil military operations for coalition forces, "are using access as a crutch for not being able to deliver."

### **A Walk in the Desert**

One day at the ministry, Brown met a woman in a black *abaya*, the full-length covering that some Muslim women wear in public. An official suggested that Brown might be able to help her.

"She was sitting right next to me," Brown recalled. "I turned to her and focused on her, and I could see she was just really, really upset. Her eyes were just swollen with tears."

Through Brown's interpreter, the woman told her story. During the fighting in Fallujah in April, U.S. tanks drove across her property and began firing. After the shooting stopped, the woman's twin daughters were dead.

Brown thought of his own two children. The woman handed him a copy of a claim for compensation she had filed with the U.S. military. She said she was poor, had little family and needed help.

The interpreter gave her the equivalent of about \$60 in Iraqi dinars. Brown handed her everything he had at the time: \$18. He also promised that he would make sure her claim was filed.

On Jan. 20, Brown visited the National Iraqi Assistance Center, set up by the coalition so Iraqis can check on the status of claims, see whether relatives have been detained or apply for employment.

The center is in the Green Zone. To reach it, Iraqis must pass through three body searches. They risk being marked for death as accomplices of the Americans. Brown can drive from the palace in about three minutes, show his ID and walk in.

At the center, an Army major in Brown's unit apologized. Because of a Muslim holiday and security concerns related to the elections, all of the center's Iraqi staff were on leave until early February. The Iraqis keep the files, so there was no way to check into the woman's claim.

Brown winced with exasperation. Even something as simple as checking on a claim was a walk in the desert. He asked the major to make a copy of the woman's paperwork and keep it in case it had to be refilled.

"So," Brown said, "this is another bust."

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Brown and son Jonathan, 4, are shown in July spending time together a few months before Brown deployed for duty as a lawyer in the Army Reserve. Brown also has a daughter, Rebecca, 10.

**Photograph by:** Michael Lutzky -- The Washington Post  
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